

Indian-NZ culture shock sparks films

By JULIAN SLADE

Coming straight from an Indian village to a new home in Newton Gully was a massive culture shock for a four-year-old girl.

It was also an experience that prompted Mandrika Rupa, now a grown woman living in Herne Bay, to become a film-maker. The impact of the change fuelled both her creativity and her drive to express herself visually.

"My eyes were opened to different visual things. The lighting was different in New Zealand, and the architecture and people were different too."

Growing up in a poor working-class family and coming from a traditional culture that did not emphasise literacy, Rupa took a long time to express herself artistically.

"There just wasn't time to express my ideas, and it wasn't until later in life that I could show that passion."

Now, with a documentary, *Poonam*, under her belt and a new short film, *Nayazamana*, expected to premiere at the Auckland International Film Festival in July, Rupa is using that initial culture shock and her experiences working with Indian women to prove the viability of migrant women telling their own stories.

Her social work with Indian women facing the dual bind of racism and sexism and coping with mental health and cross-cultural issues brought up a lot of emotions for her, and also gave her ideas for the film.

"I've used this information in a positive way, so I'm not saddened by it."

Nayazamana is a 10-minute-long film about



INDIAN KIWIS: Mandrika Rupa's short film *Nayazamana* will premiere at the Auckland International Film Festival in July.

a poor solo-parent Indian family in Auckland. The son is a "Westie" who drives a Holden and smokes cannabis with his Kiwi mates. The daughter works in a factory.

Enter a hard-drinking Fijian-Indian aunt who has come to arrange a marriage, and the drama begins.

Rupa's fascination with visual elements means there is only a short burst of dialogue in the film. It is in Hindi and subtitled in English.

The self-taught filmmaker wrote and directed the film. Before she made her documentary in 1994 she travelled overseas to meet other independent film-makers whose work she admired. She is adamant about retaining control of her images.

"I read something from an indigenous film-maker that every culture has a right and a responsibility to represent its own people. That responsibility is so fun-

damental that it can't be left in the hands of outsiders, nor can it be usurped by them."

Word has got out on the Internet about Rupa's latest project. She has been invited to show her new film at Desh Pardesh, a major Indian arts festival in Toronto, and asked to address a coloured women's festival in San Francisco.

Nayazamana is being subtitled in France and will be completed at the end of April.